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ABSTRACT

This report surveys the development of librarianship in West Africa since 1954, focusing primarily on the production of professional library literature in Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, the five countries which constitute the sub-region of English-speaking West Africa. An overview of library developments is presented, and three journals, the Wala News, Nigerian Libraries, and Ghana Library Journal, are discussed in detail. An examination of future prospects in the production of professional library literature is included. (FM)

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Library Literature in English-Speaking West Africa; Its Achievements, Problems and Prospects

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Introduction - Brief Historical Survey

On September 25, 1954, the West African Association was formally inaugurated in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. This event marked a important phase in the development of libraries and librarianship on the West Coast of Africa. The birth of the association was a direct result of a highly successful seminar organised by UNESCO the previous year in another Nigerian city on the theme 'Problems of Public Library Development in Africa'. It is exactly 25 years ago since the association was formed. A quarter of a century in the life of a professional body is a big enough volume of time during which a lot could happen and has, indeed, happened in the case of West African librarianship. This paper is thus in the broad sense a survey of the developments since then with particular reference to the production of professional literature in the five countries Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia which make up the sub region, English - speaking West Africa. For some accident of history, however, librarianship in West Africa has been to a large extent a Ghana/Nigerian affair. Of the 134 registered members (both personal and institutional) at the inauguration of the West African Library Association (WALA) 81 came from Nigeria, 47 from the Gold-Coast (Ghana) 5 from Sierra Leone and none from the Gambia and Liberia. While the association was intended to embrace all five countries, Liberia never became a member and nothing of consequence came from the Gambia, apparently because of its size, though it has recently established a national library which is really a public library. For the purpose of this paper therefore we shall confine

ourselves to Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Even so at the time of the UNESCO seminar Library services were available only in a few areas of these countries. Today there are good library services of all types. In 1953 there were only two indigenous West Africans (one from Ghana, the other from Nigeria) holding the fellowship of the British Library Association. Today the number is running into the two hundreds and there are many more with similar and even higher qualifications. *Wala News* was then the only professional journal; today one could name about a dozen. The question, however, is how many of these are still in circulation ? How many have survived their first two volumes, if not issues, and how many have achieved the distinction of *Wala News* ? The truth of the matter is that the professional scene in West Africa seems to be pock-marked with journals which, perhaps all too enthusiastically and all too hastily, announce their presence and then are heard of no more- a tale of bubble existence and instant evaporation. When one therefore looks back over the past, at the present and then tries a peep into the future of library literature in West Africa the picture that emerges is a vivid cameo of achievement, and unhappy layer of dead journals and bodies of these struggling to survive, followed by another relief of hope and uncertainty.

Further library literature in the sub region can be grouped into three;-

(a) the literature emanating from the professional organs of the area,

(b) those in foreign journals, and

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(c) unpublished material both at home and abroad.

When the present writer compiled a bibliography of literature relating to libraries and librarianship in the area for the period 1940-1968 he listed just over 500 items. The estimate for the decade 1968-1978 would be twice as much. There is at a present a veritable mine of theses and dissertations submitted for the award of various degrees and diplomas in the three library schools in the area, Legon, Ibadan and Ahmedu Bello, and in the Commonwealth universities and in the United States. The Departments of library Studies at Ibadan and Legon both published a continuing series of occasional papers. In addition librarians from West Africa are publishing in professional journals all over the world. And there is a real possibility that the International Library Review, for one, may become an overseas extention of Nigerian Libraries judging from the apparent fierce competition among Nigerian Librarians to publish in that journal. In the discussion that follows however, attention will be focused on (a) that is library literature emanating from the area. And this phase of professional activity in librarianship began with *Wala News*.

2. *The first phase - Wala News and its achievements*

Before the formal inauguration of the professional body it had even launched its organ - West African Libraries, Bulletin of the West African Library Association, the first issue of which came out in March 1954 under the editorship of John Harris, then Librarian of the University College, Ibadan. At the inaugural conference of the association, the name of the journal was changed to *Wala News*, Bulletin of the West

African Library Association. Wala News saw continuous publication for almost ten years during which it ran into four volumes with issues totaling 16, making it roughly four issues to a volume and two number per year. During this period it set out to inform and unit those interested in equipping this part of the world with a library service such as is enjoyed today by the more fortunate of the world's population. This responsibility it discharged with unfailing regularity.

And it came as an irony of fate that the journal together with the unity it had served to promote in the profession was sacrificed for so-called national goals in 1961. Before its demise, however, *Wala News* had put the region in the professional map the world over, and had aroused a lot of interest in West African librarianship. The standard of articles was generally high, though initially many were largely straight forward descriptive accounts of the existing library services. Others were however real contributions to library thought in the area as some of the presidential addresses, individual articles and memoranda submitted by the association clearly show. The editorial work was competent; there were from time to time good illustrations and plates. Above all *Wala News* had the services of a good printer - the Ibadan University Press. If the journal had depended on private printing presses many of whom produce work of an indifferent quality the story of Wala News would have been different. An analysis of the contents of the issues between 1955 and 1962 shows that the majority was made of papers, reports and other proceedings of conferences. This might have been an editorial policy. In any case in a situation where the professional organ came

out twice yearly it was not only legitimate but also a bound duty to devote one issue to the proceedings of the meetings of the association. This, curiously enough, did set an unfortunate pattern - a clear case of the unintended consequence of intended action - in the sense that when for one reason or another an annual conference or meeting could not be held the editor would be hard put to finding material for an issue. Indeed this has been particularly the case with the Ghana Library Journal. But of this later.

3. SECOND PHASE - The Ashes of Wala News

A rosy picture of the period of Wala News may have been painted in the foregoing. This is not to suggest that Mr. Harris and his editorial staff escaped the difficulties and other nightmares of the editor of a professional journal in a developing country. Difficulties there were, but the harsh lines of those were blunted by the dedication and enthusiasm, which the editor brought to bear on the work and the prevailing economic and political conditions. When in 1961 the Council of Wala resolved that the association and political conditions should reconstituted into a federation of library associations with the consequent formation of the Ghana Library Association and the Nigerian Library Association the hope was to continue the publication of Wala News under the new title of WAFLA news. The hoped-for WAFLA News did not materialize. In the process however Wala News ceased functioning after a career of almost a decade. From the ashes of Wala News rose optimistically two new journals, the Ghana Library Journal and the Nigerian Libraries and they have since

dominatod the field. Tho former appeared in October, 1963 under the editorship of R.C. Benge while the latter, took a year to appear with good old John Harris as editor. We shall return to these later. In the meantime it appeared the centrifugal trend occasioned by the dissolution of WALA had caught on as many regional divisions of the Nigerian Library Association apparently felt they were matured enough to launch their own bulletins; for between 1964 and 1966 no less than five journals made their debut on the professional scene. These were:-

a. Northern Nigeria Library Notes, 1964
b. West Nigeria Library Bulletin, 1964
c. Nigerian Student Librarian 1965
d. Eastern Nigeria School Libraries Association Bulletin 1965
e. The Lagos Librarian 1966.

While the very size of Nigeria coupled with administrative, communication and other factors called for a large measure of decentralization, many doubted the wisdom in the proliferation of professional journals in the same field. And it came as no surprise to observers when many of these folded up after their first two numbers as a result of financial, and technical problems, not mention the many political changes which took place in the country's administrative set up. One only hopes that the recent division of Nigeria into 19 states with the possible setting up of a state library service in each of these would not be followed by the launching of 19 more professional journals. That would not redound to the good of the profession; it would merely confuse the Nigerian library scene. Of the five mentioned only the Lagos Librarian was still

in circulation by 1972. Attempts were also being made some time ago to revive the *Northern Nigerian Library Notes* under the new name Northern States Library Notes. But nothing has come out of it yet. It is interesting to note that most librarians in Ghana are not aware of existence of other library journals in Nigeria apart from the Nigerian Libraries. Indeed because of communication and other problems, many Ghanaian librarians including the present author have not seen any issues of the Nigerian Libraries since 1974. Comparative librarianship cannot be effectively taught under these circumstances. The trend of the professional isolation of the national associations which set in after the cessation of *Wala News* seems to be increasing every year.

4. *THIRD PHASE - New Journals on the Scene*

Recently there have been additions to the professional literature in West Africa. The Sierra Leone Library Association launched its mouth piece the *Sierra Leone Journal* in January 1974. Intended to appear twice yearly in January and June respectively, it is mimeographed and in loose sheet binding. According to the editorial of vol.2 (1) January, 1975 the journal has been favourably received both at home and abroad. All too soon in its career, however, it came face to face with the all too familiar problems - financial editorial and other technical difficulties. Consequently it did not appear in 1976 and volume 3 which should have appeared then only managed to come out in 1977.

From Ahmedu Bello and Legon universities have come the Library Scientist and the Legon Librarian-Archivist; they are both student magazines published by the Society of Library Science Students, Ahmedu

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Bello University Zaria, and students of the Department of Library and Archival Studies, University of Ghana respectively. Like the Sierra Leone Library Journal they are both mimeographed and in loose sheet binding. Even this relatively simple and cheap method of producing a journal is not without its problems. The second number of the Legon Librarian/Archivist is over a year late.

The National Library of Nigeria also publishes a beautifully printed and illustrated house journal called the Nigerbiblios.

5. *THE TWO SURVIVORS - Nigerian Libraries and the Ghana Library Journal.*

1. We referred earlier on to the Nigerian Libraries and the Ghana Library Journal as the most widely known of the current journals in Librarianship in West Africa. Like their predecessor Wala News they are both indexed in Library Literature and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA). Of the two, however, Nigerian Libraries has been the more successful. It is the one library journal that has managed to achieve an unbroken record in its frequency. While there have sometimes been delays it has nevertheless maintained its target of three issues per year since 1964 with ever increasing levels in the quality of articles. In many ways it has been the successor to Wala News. Not only is it printed and published for the association by the Ibadan University Press; its editors were also associated with Wala News. The type face is almost the same and the quality of paper continues to be good. While the format is much bigger than the Wala News, different colours are used for the

covers of each volume as happened in the case of Wala News. The success story of Nigerian Libraries notwithstanding the Ghana Library Journal in a curious way appears a more interesting case study than the former because of the many problems which have plaqued it.

2. *Ghana Library Journal*

The Ghana Library Journal has been beset with crippling difficulties which have almost literally forced it out of circulation. Indeed one cannot accurately describe the journal as dead or surviving either. It is actually drowning and an urgent rescue operation is needed. At the time of writing the latest issue of the journal is volume 5 (1) dated June, 1973. The number (2) of this volume which should have come out in December of the same year has, without seeking to be uncharitable, been in the press since then. How does an editor of a journal which is supposed to come out twice yearly even begin to tell his subscribers both at home and abroad that one issue or number has been in the press for five years ? How did that come about ? Either his is a clear case of incompetence or he must be operating under extraordinarily bizarre circumstances. What does a new editor on the scene do in such a case ? Must he continue with the one in the press or abandon it and start a new series altogether ? These are same of the questions that the present writer, currently the editor, has been trying to find answers to in addition to the unenviable task of writing up apologies upon apologies. Perhaps as an act of atonement and to save its face the Ghana Library Association came out with a 'communication series' during the five year hiatus.

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Numbers 1 and 2 of this series were issued in 1976 and 1977 respectively. Mimeographed and stapled together they are both proceedings of a workshop on ISBD held in July 1975 and a number of symposia held by the association on theme ' problems communication between the library and its users' in connection with the International Book Year 1972.

This, however, does not make the case of the Ghana Library Journal any less bizarre. The fact of the matter is that the journal seems to mirror all the problems associated with the publication of a professional journal in a developing country:-

(i) a small and weak professional organization made even weaker by apathy,

(ii) financial ills and

(iii) technical problems.

2.1 *Weak professional organization*

In spite of the many good libraries in Ghana the number of practising librarians is less than 150. As at 1977 the paid up members of the Ghana Library Association was only 72. Even if each member paid a subscription rate of ₵10.00 (ten cedis) this would not yield enough funds to support a journal, not to mention other activities of the association. Indeed the organization has not even been able to raise the fee of about ₵300.00 for the registration of the association as required by the professional bodies registration decree. Luckily, perhaps, this would not even be necessary at present as the decree in question had been repeated

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following a confrontation between the government and the professional bodies in the country. The Ghana Library Association did not feature on either side of the debate. Further as a result of apathy the president of the association had to take over the functions of editor in addition his numerous responsibilities; he is the librarian of the Research Library on African Affairs, which compiles the Ghana National Bibliography and the Ghana representative on COMLA not to mention the many local boards on which he serves. After the biennial meeting in September 1973 the association could not even meet again until August 1977. The organizational base of the association is thus a very weak reed to lean on for any effective professional activity.

2.2 *Financial and Technical problems*

The full diamensions of the problem can only be assessed when one adds the financial and technical ones. Prices in Ghana have run riot to a degree that is just unbelievable. Printing costs are just staggering. A recent quotation from one printing firm put the cost of printing 300 copies of the (trimmed size of about 21 cm x $14\frac{1}{2}$ cm.) at the equivalent of almost $4,000.00. On this showing the journal would have to sell for not less than the equivalent of $15.00. Who would buy a mere 50 page pamphlet for $15.00 ? If one wrote off all the liabilities of the professional association its assets would not be any where near $4,000.00 . Quotations from other printers are only marginally different. And in a country where there are no friends-of-the-library societies, let alone, of library associations - and the Ghanaian Carnegie is yet to be born, if he will ever be born - the professional organization just - cannot effectively operate.

But the problems do not end there. Printers themselves add their own problems to those of the editor of a professional journal. While there are only few good printing houses, they are so over loaded that they would not accept any more because they all face the chronic problem of serious shortages of essential items like paper. The Ghanaian situation as far as publishing and printing go is best summed up by an author who recently observed, 'if you (the writer) set out to print anything on your own the printing costs will stagger you. If you manage to print the distribution difficulties will blow your mind. If you give your stuff to a local publisher you will sympathize so much with his problems that you may never write again'. In the face of all these is it any more surprising that nothing much has come from Ghana lately in respect of professional literature ?.

6. *Prospects for the future*

We have attempted to show that in the production of professional library literature West Africa has achieved some measure of success, but the general picture is dark indeed. What then are the prospects for the future ? Undoubtedly Nigeria will continue to lead the rest of West Africa in this field. Its very size of the country, the strength of the professional organisation, the leadership offered by the national library, the relatively good infrastructure of publishing and printing houses - one need not mention the oil boom - clearly augur well for the future. Ghana, Sierra Leone and the other two have a long way to go to catch up with the level of scholarly publishing and printing that obtains in Nigeria. It is possible Ghana for one may have to forget

the question of finesse and produce the journal in near print as Sierra Leone has done, while making all efforts to resuscitate the journal. The Council of the Ghana Library Association is actively considering this. While bodies like the Ghana Book Development Council are trying to tackle the whole question of book industry it is not likely that professional literature in librarianship in the area would go back to the days of Wala News inspite of the recent political and economic efforts to bring the subregion into closer cooperation. While the future is not necessarily bleak it is neither one of optimism.

13(13)